

A full-page background image of a Marine in camouflage gear, including a helmet and a backpack, aiming a rifle. The title 'DUMP-EX Down Under' is overlaid on the top half of the image in a large, textured, 3D font.

DUMP-EX Down Under

By Capt. Joe Cleary

Australia — a place where Marines always can count on good training and great liberty. But if you get hurt doing the former, you miss out on the latter. That was the case when a hot weapon, no spare barrel, and a stoppage combined to spoil the best-laid plans.

Ready for training, our unit arrived in the beautiful Razorback sector of Shoalwater Bay Training Area in Queensland, Australia. While underway to this area, we had learned that the instruction for our training allowed great leeway in setting up our ranges. We were

looking forward to creating realistic conditions to maximize training. We were more than ready to finally get off the ship and hit the beach!

Our first three days of training couldn't have gone better. We worked our way up from squad and platoon live-fire attacks to a company live-fire attack. The only problems came from a few small fires we created. Faster than we realized, our four days Down Under were drawing to a close. The plan was to end our training with a platoon-size, live-fire ambush at night. The company leaders didn't waste any time; planning began that

morning. Walking the terrain of the ambush site, the company commander positioned our company on a finger near a road. This road, which paralleled the finger, was to be our impact area. We calculated our surface-danger zones and submitted them to range control for approval. We returned to the assembly area, completed the op-order, briefed the plan, and began our rehearsals.

Range control gave us several hours to conduct the ambush. We had plenty of ammo for four platoons to rotate through the live-fire exercise. Battalion directed us to fire off all ammo and pyro, and not bring back any to the ship. Sunset was late because of the time of year, and we were told that the range would shut down at 2300. Planning had taken into account 30 minutes so the Marines' eyes could adapt to the darkness. As the time drew near to move to the ambush site, range control

stoppage. He took immediate action, but the weapon still wouldn't fire. Without hesitation, he took remedial action (investigated the cause of the stoppage). He opened the feed tray cover and looked inside the hot weapon. As he did, a round cooked off. He was taken to a distant hospital and didn't rejoin our unit until after the port visit.

Here are some of the factors that contributed to this mishap:

1. The SAW gunner didn't take proper remedial action for a hot weapon. Instead of waiting 15 minutes to guard against a cook off, he decided to go ahead and visually investigate the cause of the stoppage. (Reference MCWP 3-15.1)

2. The SAW barrel was not changed during the shoot. This led to a hot weapon where a cook-off

called to inform us the hours had changed: The range now would shut down at 2200, an hour earlier. This change meant we had one hour, instead of two, to move to the site, position the Marines, assign sectors, shoot, clear weapons, and account for each Marine. These tasks were required for each platoon prior to the next one's firing in the dark. The company commander quickly gathered us together to brief how we were going to adjust our timeline to get all platoons through the ambush site. We scrapped the assembly area and staged each platoon closely behind the other to save time.

The first two platoons rotated through without a glitch, but the third one had a problem. Several minutes into the shoot, a Marine screamed. It was one of the SAW gunners. A round had cooked off in his face, causing powder burns to his eyes and several cuts to his face. Investigators later found the Marine had encountered a

became likely. Investigators found that most of the company's SAW gunners left their spare barrels in the ship's armory. They felt the spare barrels were unnecessary, because they rarely changed barrels during live-fire exercises.

3. The Marines were told to expend all ammo, and they knew they didn't have much time. Which Marine wasn't going to make it happen? Each platoon had more than enough ammo to shoot in the original amount of time allotted. Obviously, shortening a timeline when you have lots of ammo to shoot increases the rate of fire—and that can be risky.

Most Marines would never stop to think that too much ammo and too little time is a problem. However, it is a problem when you don't have a spare barrel, ignore a hot gun, and inspect a jam with your face. ☹️

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Photo alteration by Allan Amen